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Bouyahi, Hamid

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OPENNESS AND CLOSEDNESS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEMS THAT CAUSED THE ARAB SPRING

Hamid Bouyahi, PhD Candidate

Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

Bouyahi.h[at]gmail.com

Abstract

Most of the analysis of the Arab spring revolved around the immediate causes of the events and the role of social media in spreading the protests, in countries that succeeded in toppling their regimes. For this reason, this study adopts a different approach to tackle the long-term development of the Political opportunity structures that set the grounds for the emergence of these movements. To avoid the bias of focusing only on movements that succeeded, the paper compares the conditions of the emergence of the Egyptian movement that toppled the Mubarak regime in eighteen days, to the Moroccan movement that faded after a year of weekly protests. Instead of discussing the immediate context in which the movements appeared, or the course of events that the movements followed, the paper adopts a historical approach to review the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial historical, economic and political developments that created different structures of opportunity and threat in each of the two countries.

Key words: Egypt; Morocco; colonization; civil society; political parties; openness; closedness

INTRODUCTION

The openness of a political system is generally measured by its admissibility and tolerability towards public opinion's criticism and suggestions. This means that we can say that a regime is open only as long as it has enough media and mechanisms that provide its public with direct and indirect access to the decision-making process. Nonetheless, it is difficult to measure the openness and closedness of states towards their public, mainly because of the complexity and diversity of the political apparatus in each state. For this reason, the paper relies on the methodological analysis that Herbert P. Kitschelt (1986) suggests in his article "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest".

Kitschelt's criteria of analysis target four main areas of the political apparatus. The first criterion – which can be used to measure the openness of a political system – is the number of political parties and fractions that have real effects on the political scene of the given country. The second criterion is related to the independence of the legislative from the executive branches in making and controlling policies. The final two criteria can be summarized in the way new demands develop into new policies and the patterns of intermediation between interest groups and the executive (Kitschelt 1986, 63). As a result, this section of the paper will depend on these criteria to compare the openness of the political system in Egypt to that of Morocco, before the Arab spring. Egypt will be discussed first

because its social movement occurred before the Moroccan one, then the same criteria will be applied to Morocco. This means that, after discussing the effects of colonization on the two countries, there will be a discussion of the development of the political parties and the civil society in Egypt then in Morocco. There will also be a discussion of the way in which the two regimes reacted to opposition throughout their recent history. Finally, this section will try to draw a picture of the general political atmosphere that existed in the two countries prior to the events of the Arab spring.

OPENNESS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN EGYPT

The Arab Republic of Egypt is a transcontinental republic that borders “the Mediterranean Sea, between Libya and the Gaza Strip, and the Red Sea north of Sudan, and includes the Asian Sinai Peninsula” (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). Its geographical location, along with its Nile Delta and the Suez Canal made Egypt one of the strongest and most influential countries in the MENA region for more than 5000 years. Egypt is also one of the most populated Arab countries, with more than 80 million citizens, who are mainly Arab Muslims except for a minority of Christian Copts. It was this great population growth that shifted the Egyptian economy, from the exportation of agricultural products to the extraction and export of oil and natural gas in addition to its reliance on tourism and the services’ industry (Goldschmidt 2008).

Pre-colonial Egypt

The geographical location of Egypt has long been the cause of its almost permanent struggle against invasion, colonization, and protectorate. After centuries of the rule of the Pharaohs, the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, then the Muslims and the Ottomans, Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Egypt in 1798. It remained under the French control until 1801 when Bonaparte’s campaign had to end because of the successive defeats by the British navy (Dykstra 1998). Throughout the following century of prosperity, under the *Khedivate* rule, Egypt organized its administration –with British and French supervision– and started expanding its geographical, economic and political influence in the region (Ahmed 1998). However, as many Egyptians refused the foreign manipulation, the Urabi’s Revolution (1881-1882) – under the slogan “Egypt for the Egyptians” – threatened the British interests in Egypt and was used as a pretext for the British invasion that started in 1882 (Reid 1998).

Colonial Egypt

As the Ottomans were Britain’s allies and Egypt was still an Ottoman province the occupation was not officially declared, and the British associated their existence with the persistence of the problems that brought them in the first place. Their plans for financial and governmental reforms were firmly implemented by “Lord Cromer (Sir Evelyn Baring)” who remained in Egypt as an “agent and consul-general from 1883 to 1907” (Daly 1998, 240). He succeeded in modernizing the state and in enhancing its financial and economic status-quo; yet this was at the expense of social issues, education, and liberties. In 1906, a more liberal protectorate was established after “The Dinshawai incident” in which a small fracas in the Dinshawai village escalated and unified the nationalists against the brutal invaders (Daly 1998, 243). In 1914, the Ottomans who entered the First World War on the side of central powers ceased to be Britain’s allies. The British reaction was the unilateral declaration of Egypt as a protectorate, ending the Ottoman Empire’s control of Egypt and replacing *Khedive*

Abbas Hilmi by a new Sultan – his uncle – *Husayn Kamil* (Daly 1998; Federal Research Division 1991). Britain continued using Egypt as a military base to secure its interests in the region, namely the Suez Canal, and as a source of cheap labor and income, during the four years of the war. Finally, the arrest of Saad Zaghlul and other leaders of the nationalist Wafd Party in 1919 triggered a nation-scale revolution that made the British authorities declare Egypt's independence on 28 February 1922, and return to the informal protectorate (Central Intelligence Agency 2015).

Post-colonial Egypt

Britain remained the strongest player in the Egyptian arena, followed by the king Fouad the First – the father of king Faruk – and the Wafd Party that had the greatest popular support. This support declined after the death of Zaghlul and after two terms in which the party had won elections with a majority but failed to achieve socio-economic changes and even signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 (Federal Research Division 1991). As the liberal line failed, Egypt's students, workers, and nationalists "argued more convincingly for communism" (Daly 1998, 308). This led to the emergence of parties like The Muslim Brotherhood, the People's Party (*Hizb Asha'ab*), the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (*Hizb al-Ahrar al-Dusturiyyin*), the Union Party (*Hizb al-Ittihad*) and the Saadist Party (*Hizb al-Saadiyin*) (Goldschmidt 2008). The Liberal Constitutionalist and the Saadists formed the 1945 government, but along with the king Faruq they were seen as traitors after failing to defend Palestine from the Zionist invasion in 1948 (Botman 1998).

After this bitter defeat, the economic crisis that followed the Second World War and the assassination of Hassan Al Banna, for which the police were the primary suspect, the King Faruq became in a very weak position (Alexander 2011). He had to face the protests that had been recurring for almost seven years; he had to face the growing power of the Muslim brotherhood, and he had to deal with a group of junior officers that was growing within his army and planning to overthrow him (Alexander 2011).

Gamal Abdelnasser

On 23 July 1952, the Free Officers, led by Muhammad Naguib and Jamal Abdel Nasser, carried out a coup D'état, exiled the king and seized power with the popular and militant support of the Muslim Brotherhood (Alexander 2011). With a relatively communist ideology, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) ruled Egypt until 1954 with a firm hand. The council dissolved all the political opposition forces while it developed education, raised wages, reduced working hours and nationalized lands and properties (Federal Research Division 1991, 58-59). After Abdel Nasser had assumed power, he replaced the multi-party liberal system with the one-party system and benefited from his assassination attempt to crush the Communists, dissolve the Muslim Brotherhood and even dispose of the opposition within the RCC (Roussillon 1998). The result of this total suppression of opposition was an overwhelming domination of the executive authority over the legislative and the judiciary for the next fifty years.

The 1952 revolution was the beginning of the end of liberalism and democracy in Egypt. To secure the gains of the revolution, the National Union was created as an organization in which members of all other political factions can rally (Roussillon 1998). This was used as a pretext to consider anyone who tried to act beyond the National Union as a traitor who served foreign agendas; especially, the communists who were rallying against the policies of Abdel Nasser. However, as Abdel Nasser started to act as the leader of the

Arabs against the Western colonizers, and as he started to adopt the liberating communist ideology of his allies in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), he decided to substitute the National Union with the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) in 1961 (Goldschmidt 2008). Therefore, he was interested in Arab nationalism and in building an image of a strong Egypt more than his interest in the internal economic, political and social issues.

Apparently, his strategy was successful and the autocratic side of his regime was barely seen by Egyptians and by the Arabs in general. The success of his strategy was evident in 1967 when even the quick defeat after the Israeli blitz on Sinai did not stop the Egyptian and Arab masses from refusing his resignation on 9 June 1967, and demanding his reinstatement on the following day. Thus, he spent the rest of his presidency focusing on the Israeli conflict at the expense of the prosperity of the Egyptian economy, politics, and society (Barnett and Levy 1991).

Anwar Sadat

Anwar Sadat, the old member of the Free Officers and the vice-president of the last years of the Nasserite era, became the third Egyptian president after the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970. He did not inherit the presidency, yet 12 days after the death of Abdel Nasser “An election was held on October 15, and Sadat won more than 90 percent of the vote” (Federal Research Division 1991, 76). This became an Egyptian tradition, as the elected presidents of the one-party system would keep dominating more than 70 percent of votes in every presidential election. However, Sadat’s rule was different from his predecessor, he demilitarized the state, brought more civilian technocrats and privatized the state-owned enterprises that Abdel Nasser worked hard to nationalize (Abul-Magd 2013). The result was a presidential entourage of an emerging bourgeoisie, military leaders, and a civilian technocracy.

Anwar Sadat adopted the “open doors” (*Infitah*) policy in an attempt to boost the weak Egyptian economy. He opened the doors of Egypt to the western capitalist investors and neglected the previously established ties with the eastern communist Soviet Union (Shukor 2005). His newly established ties with the United States put him in contrast with the leftists inside Egypt and made him release the detained Muslim Brotherhood members who had to neutralize those leftist activists (Ghanem 2014). This worked well for a while, especially in 1973, when Anwar Sadat became the new hero after he crossed the Bar-Lev line. In fact, the military victory did not last long, and the real cause of Nasser’s hailed heroism was the interference of other Arab countries – and “the ability of the petroleum-exporting states, led by Saudi Arabia, to quadruple prices and reduce production” – which forced Israel and its allies’ retreat (Goldschmidt 2008, 194).

Between 1975 and 1977, he started allowing the emergence of other political parties in the Egyptian political scene. Nonetheless, he suppressed all the voices that represented real and strong opposition by issuing “the Political Parties Law (law 40 of 1977) [that] excluded parties based on class, religion, or regional affiliation” (Wickham 2002, 65). By doing this, he deprived the leftists, Nasserists, and the Islamists from the right to legal existence, and deprived the legal parties from the right to criticize his policies. Sadat’s rule was more liberal than that of Abdel Nasser; but in general, it was a closed regime that allowed only enough political freedom to advertise its “political liberalization”. In reality:

Restrictive electoral laws, poll rigging, continued limits on the press, and the considerable power of the president, including his ability to appoint a full third of the upper house of Egypt’s legislature, ensured that political activity remained circumscribed (Cook 2007, 26).

In the final years of his rule, Sadat substituted the ruling Arab Socialist Party with the National Democratic Party. To provide it with some legitimacy, he created moderate opposition that included the rightist Socialist Liberal Party (*Ahrar*) and the leftist National Progressive Unionist party (*Tagammu'*) which were “two “loyal” opposition parties (center right and center left) headed by politicians close to the regime and lacking ties to a mass base” (Wickham 2002, 65). The real leftists and rightists in Egypt formed secret parties and organizations and were chased, detained and tortured by the regime that could not stand their growing criticism (Shukor 2005).

Disapproval grew as the image of the hero started shaking in 1978 when Sadat signed the Camp David accords, and in 1979 when he signed the Peace Treaty with Israel (Ghanem 2014). By demonstrating compliance and consent to the Israelis and their American allies, Anwar Sadat waved away what was probably his only advantage in the Egyptian public opinion. The result was his assassination in 1981 by a group of Egyptian officers who belonged to a religious extremist group, called ‘Al Jihad’ (Holly War), during the October 6th, Victory Parade (Federal Research Division 1991). This assassination was the pretext for the announcement of a three-decade state of emergency by the vice-president Hosni Mubarak, who assumed power as an interim president after the death of Sadat (Hassan H. A. 2011).

Hosni Mubarak

Mubarak was different from his predecessors in the fact that he had no specific ideology and no plans to maintain the regional leadership of Egypt. He did not have the Arab nationalist tendencies of Abdel Nasser and he did not try to unify the Arabs against Israel, like Sadat. His main goal was to survive as an Egyptian president, and he succeeded in doing so for thirty years. In this vein, Curtis R. Ryan (2001) believes that “Mubarak's slow and methodical diplomacy has had none of the dramatic successes of Nasser or Sadat; but neither has it resulted in any grand failures” (12). Therefore, instead of following the steps of the previous presidents who had covered their internal failure by relying on external glories, Mubarak had to work on the local problems of Egypt.

In the first years of his rule, Mubarak started disseminating a discourse of political openness towards the different actors of the Egyptian society. In the first decade of his rule, he allowed the increase of the number of political parties from three to thirteen (Wickham 2002). The Muslim Brotherhood was more tolerated and though it did not have the total freedom to act as a political party, it had the right to act inside the Egyptian society and to provide some services to the Egyptian people as part of its non-violent activism (Kausch 2012). Mubarak had also inaugurated a reconciliation process with the major opposition figures by meeting some of those who had been imprisoned by Sadat, at the presidential palace, in a move that aimed at demonstrating his indulgence and good will (Ryan 2001). In addition to that, Mubarak allowed a relatively free press that could criticize his regime and succeeded in coining the image of a free judiciary that could legitimize political parties that the government had banned (Wickham 2002; Kienle 2001).

At the economic and social levels, Mubarak had managed to install series of actions that aimed at polishing his image as a president that could guarantee a better future for the Egyptian masses. In fact, he depended on the United States’ aid to launch a variety of economic and social projects. This aid was given to him to maintain the diplomatic relationships with Israel, and it was supposed to target the reinforcement of the military and the economy of Egypt. Therefore, he used it in “expanding the water and sewer system of greater Cairo, upgrading the telephone network, building new schools, introducing better varieties of wheat and rice, and extending family planning services” (Goldschmidt 2008, 214-

215). The United States' aid was not enough and Egypt had to borrow money from international organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank. This strategy led the 1990s Egypt to follow the "structural adjustment policy" that would lead to more privatization, less social projects and to the deepening of socio-economic problems (Gumuscu 2010, 850). To secure the newly adopted unpopular policies, Mubarak knew that he had to bring back the army to the political scene, and "While Sadat made conscious efforts to subordinate the army and demilitarize the state, Mubarak restored its privileged position in Egyptian society and welcomed it as a full partner to his regime" (Ryan 2001, 07). The result was that the image of Mubarak as the democratic and open-minded leader started to wane and was going to be replaced by the image of the brutal leader who could do anything to remain in his chair.

The openness of his political system towards new parties appeared to be trivial as neither the elections nor the free judiciary could change the fact that the National Democratic Party kept controlling the parliament (Kienle 2001). The opposition parties that had the right to act in Egypt had been isolated from the public and had very limited numbers of regular adherents that ranged "from several hundred to a few dozen" (Wickham 2002, 70). In addition to that, when some parties and their leaders tried to act as real opposition they were subjected to intimidation or imprisonment –as in the case of the *Ghad* (Tomorrow) Party leader Ayman Nur who was imprisoned during the 2005 elections, after he had "expressed concern about the state of human rights in Egypt" (Goldschmidt 2008, 217). Therefore, the claimed free judiciary could not act independently from the executive authority, and remained "vulnerable to pressure from the justice and interior ministries" (Goldschmidt 2008, 217).

The civil society in Egypt played a similar role to that of the political parties. In addition to the existence of more than 89 Syndicates, Trade Unions, and Interest Groups, the Egyptian regime had allowed the emergence of more than 14 600 civil associations that tried to enhance the economic, social, cultural and developmental facets of the Egyptian society (Hassan H. A. 2011). However, under the control of the Ministry of Social Affairs, that had the right to allow new associations and to ban the existing ones, the Egyptian civil society had a very limited span of action (Wickham 2002). In other words, the existence of the Egyptian civil associations was tolerated only as long as they contributed to the creation of "a climate in which civil and political freedoms may be legitimately sacrificed in the name of national unity and security" (Pratt 2005, 74). As Mubarak started gaining more confidence, his relatively democratic and open regime kept toughening its manners. According to Nahed Eltantawi and Julie B. Wiest (2011):

Presidential and parliamentary elections lacked transparency; corruption permeated all government bodies; and political conditions for Egyptian citizens were oppressive, preventing free expression, protest opportunities, and general political participation (1210).

In their 2011 election program, the Freedom and Justice Party claimed that "The number of detainees in President Mubarak's reign exceeded 100 thousand detainees; that ranged from 3 months to ten years imprisonment with an average of 50 thousand years of the lives of Egypt's youth behind bars" (The Freedom and Justice Party 2011, 04). As a result, the regime that started by working on the economic and social issues to secure its existence was reoriented towards suppression and autocracy, as the structural adjustments imposed less social projects and less room for fair democratic treatment. The economic difficulties that Mubarak faced could be seen as a weak excuse to the tough procedures that he had to follow to maintain Egypt's stability. Nonetheless, Mubarak had other excuses as he argued that his

adopted severe measures were to protect the majority of the illiterate Egyptians who might have been easily manipulated by ‘evil’ political parties that could flourish in a real multi-party system. In this vein, Mubarak said:

In our democracy, we exploit the citizens’ simplicity. We have a high rate of uneducated people. Because of this simplicity and the high rate of uneducated people, we can infuse very dangerous ideas into the people’s minds. Democracy can be soundly established when you have educated people, people who can read and write. (Wickham 2002, 67).

The results of his actions, either because of his fear for the interest of his people or for his personal greed, were the creation of a closed political system. The diversity of the political parties had no effects on the political life or the political decision-making process in Egypt. The free judiciary was only free as long as it did not threaten the president and his allies’ interests. The legislative role that the parliament was supposed to play was stagnant, because of the total domination of the president’s National Democratic Party. Even the civil society could not act as an independent body and had to abide by the state’s regulations as a condition for survival. Consequently, the only solution that was left for the Egyptians was to resort to para-constitutional organizations and movements that could act beyond the regime’s consent and under its threat.

OPENNESS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN MOROCCO

The North African Moroccan Kingdom is the closest African country to Europe and is located in the far West of the Maghreb region. Morocco’s estimated 34 million inhabitants are mainly Muslims while less than 1 percent is made of Christians and Jews (Federal Research Division 2006). The Moroccans’ official languages are Arabic and Tamazight (Berber) –that became an official language only in the 2011 constitution– while French is the language of administration and official documents (Chaker 2013). On the economic level, Morocco is mainly an agricultural country that benefits from its location and its long coastal borders to export agricultural products. In addition to agriculture, the Moroccan economy relies on its reserve of Phosphate and its ability to attract foreign investments and to provide stable and diverse revenues (African Development Bank 2015).

Pre-colonial Morocco

The documented history of Morocco dates back to the beginnings of the Phoenician and Carthaginian invasions of the Atlantic coast of Morocco around 1000 Years BC. The Berber inhabitants of Morocco were subject to successive invasions after the vandals, as the Romans who had allied with Massinissa and had established Juba The Second as the king of “Mauretania Tingitana”, in the second and third centuries BC, annexed the kingdom in the year forty BC (Park and Boum 2005, lxiii). After the Romans, Tangier remained under the control of the Vandals then the Visigoths until the beginnings of the seventh century when the first Muslim invader Mûsa Bno Nusayr captured Tangier and left “Tarîq Bn Ziyâd as governor” (Park and Boum, 2005, lxiii). Many Islamic Dynasties were established and removed by other Islamic Dynasties, until the coming of “the Alawis, who founded a dynasty that has remained in power since the seventeenth century” (Federal Research Division 2006, 02). In the eighteenth century, the Alawite Sultan Moulay Ismail and his slave army reestablished the superiority of the Moroccan army, which had been proven in the Battle of the Three Kings (Wadi-Lmakhazin) in 1578 (Park and Boum 2005).

However, the invasion of the neighboring Algeria had proven that the past glory and the British protection were all that protected Morocco from the fate of its neighbors. When Moulay Abd-el-Kader requested the Moroccan protection, the Alaouite army was easily defeated and surprised by the progress of the French army in the Battle of Isly in 1844 (Howe 2005, 62-63; Park and Boum 2005).

As weak Sultans could not maintain the centralized control of the Moroccan tribes and could not rely on them to strengthen their armies, the Moroccan army became so weak that it endured another major defeat by the Spanish troops in 1906. This defeat made the once strong country in a very weak position, made it accept harsh trade terms and made it sign a peace treaty that obliged it “to pay an indemnity of 100 million pesetas” that could only be gathered through higher taxes and higher prices (Burke 1976, 20). The result was a sort of tribal disobedience and even rebellions that were exacerbated by the accumulation of foreign debts by irresponsible Sultans like Moulay Abdul-Aziz and Abdul-Hafiz (Burke 1976; Park and Boum 2005; Howe 2005).

The weak kingdom became the cause of two crises between the regional colonizers and Germany in 1905 and 1911. As Britain quit defending Morocco “in exchange for free hand in Egypt”, France found ways to agree with Spain and Italy and even Abdul-Aziz the Fourth agreed to the French protectorate if they could keep him as a sultan of Morocco (Howe 2005, 64). However, the German Kaiser Wilhelm visited Morocco in 1905 to express Germany’s anger at its exclusion from the regional colonization agreements and to prevent interventions in Morocco (History.com Staff 2006). After six years, the French authorities claimed that the local tribes were revolting and threatening its interests in Fez and that the sultan Abdel Hafiz requested their interference, and Germany was “forced to back down” as it found itself isolated (History.com Staff 2009). The final step was the establishment of the protectorate in Morocco through an agreement between Abdel Hafiz and the French who gave the North and the South to the Spaniards.

Colonial Morocco

The colonization of Morocco was the end of the era when the public sphere or the civil society could change sultans who did not respond to the criteria that the men of knowledge (*Ulema*) established. In the pre-colonization era, the tribe leaders and *Ulema* could dispose of under-qualified sultans. Their ‘social contract’ (*bay’a*) said that “If the Sultan rules justly (...) then they have a duty to obey him” while “If he does not, and fails (...) it was not only the right of the people –led by the ‘ulema – to remove him, but their duty to do so” (Sater 2007, 28). Yet, since 1912, after Abdul-Hafiz had been replaced by Moulay Youssef, the French allied with the appointed sultan and protected his reign against the will of the tribes and *Ulema* of the time (Howe 2005).

The armed resistance started and spread in the North, South and The Atlas Mountains of Morocco (Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 2012). In the Northern regions of Rif, Guerilla tactics were used in the resistance of Abdelkarim El-Khattabi to the Spanish colonizer, and they culminated in Abdelkarim’s announcement of the Rif Republic in 1921 (Pennell 1986). Abdelkarim was defeated after a French-Spanish coalition while the Southern resistance of Ma’a El Ainin was suppressed through a coalition between the defeated French and some Berber tribal chiefs; namely, Glaouis who was known as “the lord of the Atlas” (Howe 2005, 65). Finally, Fez’s rebellion against the sultan and against the colonial forces was massively suppressed by the French forces (Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 2012). After the defeat of the armed resistance, and after the coronation of Mohammed V as the new sultan in 1927, nationalists started forming new fronts through which they could fight the

colonial existence (Miller 2013). Their fight aimed at achieving reforms instead of demanding independence, and they began by the demands of the removal of the Berber edict (*Dahir*) that exempted Berbers from sharia Law (Park and Boum 2005). In 1934, the nationalist supported the young sultan Mohamed Ben Youssef to become a king and, under the leadership of Allal AL Fasi, they formed the “Moroccan Action Committee” (Federal Research Division 2006, 03). In the same year “allâl al-fâsî and others presented a Plan of Reforms to the protectorate (maTâlib al-sha‘b al-maghribî), which were in part answered by the abolition of the Berber Dahir” (Park and Boum 2005, 121).

The committee that had become the first Moroccan political party was behind massive protests and confrontations with the police in Meknes and that made the French target Allal AL Fasi and exile him to Gabon in 1937 (Stenner 2014). Towards the end of the Second World War, the public demands developed from simple reforms towards independence. Those demands were voiced by the newly created “Independence Party (*Hizb al-Istiqlal*), the Party for Democracy and Independence (*Hizb al-Shura wa-l-Istiqlal*), the Moroccan Unity Party (*Hizb al-Wahda al-Maghribiyya*)” in the French areas, and the National Reform Party (*Hizb al-Islah al-Watani*) in the Spanish zones (Stenner 2014, 527-528).

In their fight for independence, the leftists, and the rightists were rallying behind the king as the symbol of sovereignty and liberation and they depicted him as a hero that had been exiled for standing against the protectorate. This 1953 exile of the king made the Moroccans formalize their secret Resistance Army that targeted the French troops in the South and North of Morocco. The French who had promised Moroccans independence for fighting with them in the Second World War were faced with strong resistance in Algeria and Morocco and were obliged to bring the king back from his exile in Madagascar. However, the glorious return of the hero did not end the armed resistance despite the fact that independence was a part of the king’s agreement with the French.

Post-colonial Morocco

As the Spanish existence in Morocco remained intact and the French troops kept using Morocco as a military base to target the Algerian resistance, it became impossible for the king to convince the resistance leaders to quit resisting and to join his newly formed Royal Armed Forces. Thus, the king and the Istiqlal party tried to control the resistance army or even to terminate it, while the latter had lost faith in its government and king. Eventually, the Moroccan resistance army was silenced, but only after its leaders and fighters were “allegedly” assassinated by the Moroccan regime (Amezian 2008; Hodges 2008; Marine Corps Intelligence Activity 2012, 6).

Mohammed V

The king also became the opponent of the Istiqlal Party that was trying to dominate the Moroccan political scene. In a controversial move, the king had to encourage a multi-party system in order to weaken the position of the Independence Party that was widely respected for its long struggle against the French colonizer. However, in the postcolonial era, the king became stronger, while the Independence Party was divided between the forces of the radical left-wing that El Mahdi Ben Barka led and the right wing that was led by the conservative Allal Al Fasi (Storm 2007, 13-14). Another important fraction within the Istiqlal party came to the fore when prominent leaders like “Abdelkrim el-Khatib and Mahjoubi Aherdane, set up a new party, the Mouvement Populaire” (Storm 2007, 16). In brief, the

king's creation of his own army and police forces and his plan to appoint less radical leftist leaders as ministers in his governments made the Istiqlal Party and all the other parties in a very weak position.

Hassan II

After 1961 when Hassan the Second became king, after the death of his father Mohammed the Fifth, autocracy took its full form. Hassan II could not support any kind of criticism or disobedience and ruled the country with an iron fist until the beginning of the 1990s. In this vein, Pierre Hazan (2006) argues that:

The “Years of the Iron Fist” (known in Morocco as “les années de plomb,” or years of lead) began in 1961 and lasted until the end of the Cold War in 1989. A climate of intimidation characterized this period. The security services were responsible for the “disappearance” of hundreds of political opponents and the torture of thousands (02).

Therefore, though the king allowed the existence of a multiparty system, this diversity was allowed only as long as it weakened all the parties while the real opposition was really oppressed. The Moroccan political system that was promoted by Hassan II allowed the existence of more than thirty political parties. Those parties were so diverse in their political orientations and trends, as they varied between “rightist, leftist, socialist, communist, and Berber-allied political parties” (Buehler 2013, 139). In addition to the “heavy-handed” handling of opposition parties, “The king used different strategies to limit the role of opposition parties including the creation of “administration parties” loyal to the Monarchy (UC, RNI, MP), the modification of electoral rules, and electoral fraud” (Ames, Picard, and Carreras 2010, 03). The rationale behind Hassan II's choice was similar to that of his father, as by allowing and even creating a big number of weak political parties the chances of a real, strong and unified opposition were minimized.

The ally of the United States during the cold war did not have to worry about Western criticism of his authoritative reign until the end of the Cold War when those western allies started demonstrating their concerns about the King's methods (Kausch 2009, 165; Ames, Picard, and Carreras 2010). The Western concerns were not enough to deter a king who had been suppressing his people for thirty years, and who had been obsessed with security after two attempts of military coups (Storm 2007). However, after the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund started imposing structural reforms, the threat of “the “bread riots” that rocked the major Moroccan cities” in the 1980s, in addition to the Western democratization demands, and the changing geopolitical arena in the Post-cold War era, made the King Hassan II consider some steps towards liberalism (Traboulsi 2009, 61). Therefore, he had to allow:

The drafting of a new Constitution, the acceptance of the principle of the alternation of power which finally brought the main opposition party—the Socialist Union of Popular Forces—to form a government, the release of political prisoners (Traboulsi 2009, 60).

The 1990s liberalization process was also behind the appearance of a hugely dispersed civil society that could not affect the Moroccan political scene. As the people could barely trust the tamed Moroccan political parties, the citizens opted for civil society as an alternative through which they could make changes and improvements to their local or national environment (Sater 2007). Nonetheless, the Moroccan regime could decide which associations it would support and which it would not even allow forming, based on their

goals and on the role they played in polishing the regime's image nationally and internationally (Dimitrovova 2009).

Mohammed VI

After the death of Hassan II in 1999, his son Mohammed the Sixth inherited the throne and the heavy legacy of an authoritarian regime. He inherited the 1996 constitution and the resulting alternance government that was headed by the strongest leftist opposition leader Abdurrahman Al Yousfi, since 1998, and that was given large margins for action (Traboulsi 2009). The king also inherited the old feud with The Justice and Charity Group (Jama'at Al Adl Wal Ihsan) that was the strongest and most radical Islamist opposition in Morocco (FRIDE 2007). Therefore, the new king had to go further with the liberation process that his ancestor started and had to find ways to announce that the old era had ended.

In this vein, his words and actions in the first years had shown that the new king's reign was the end of the era of totalitarianism, but they did not go far enough to bring the parliamentary monarchy that the Moroccan activists awaited. The new king's creation of "Equity and Reconciliation Commission" raised the public aspirations about the new age in which a king had the courage to confess his father's mistakes, free the political prisoners and even compensate them for their suffering (Ames, Picard, and Carreras 2010). Moreover, and despite the fact that the state officials who caused the old regime's human right violations were not prosecuted, some gestures like "the dismissal of the long-serving and much-hated, minister of the interior, Driss Basri" were appreciated (Owen 2004, 98). The king had also shown a great willingness to promote democracy and to modernize the country by announcing "a new concept of authority" based on the defense of public services, freedoms, security, and stability" (Howe 2005, 08). Finally, and as a response to the civil society's demands, the new king changed the family code that recommended equal status to women in the Moroccan society and the labor code that regulated and enhanced the workers' rights (Zerari 2006; Bureau Of International Labor Affairs 2004).

After many years of the new King's accession to power, these steps appeared to be trivial when compared to the fact that the general political apparatus in Morocco remained under the control of the palace or what Moroccans call (AL Mekhzen) (Dennison, Popescu, and Torreblanca 2011; Jandary 2012). This political superiority of the king and his entourage is illustrated by Shana Cohen and Larabi Jaidi (2006) who see that in Morocco:

The constitution does not limit the power of the King, who possesses divine sanction as the Amir al-Mouminine, or commander of the faithful. In Article 19, 4 all division of power in Morocco, even that of the ulemas (the authoritative council within the Islamic clergy), falls below the status of the monarch. The sole social contract represented in the political system in Morocco is that between elected representatives and the population; the King remains above political pacts (60).

Many tangible actions and events happened at the beginning of the reign of the new king and their interpretation made Moroccans less optimistic. On 17 May 2001, after The Moroccan association of the Human Rights AMDH had participated in a demonstration in Rabat:

36 militants were each condemned to three months' imprisonment and a 3000-Dirham fine (US\$300). They were found guilty of 'participating at the organization of a banned manifestation and the public, non-armed gathering that could have threatened the public order' (Sater 2007, 147).

Another event that had ended the high hopes of the liberal democratic Morocco was the Casablanca attacks of 2003. Those attacks were used as a pretext to go back to some measures of the years of lead, namely as “mass arrests and numerous convictions on nebulous charges of plotting against the state” became accepted and even called for in the name of security (Howe 2005, 334). Moroccans started feeling the seriousness of the new situation when “General Laanigri was transferred from the DST—Morocco’s FBI—to become director general of the Department of National Security” (Howe 2005, 335). This meant that another iron fist had started to take control of the daily life of Moroccans and that security could be used as a pretext for suppression.

Politically speaking, during the reign of Mohammed IV, the governments were led by the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, technocrats, then by the Istiqlal party. They were all controlled by the palace and this fact became clear as the Prime Minister Abbas el Fassi had totally abandoned his Istiqlal Party’s plan in 2007 by announcing that “his only political program was the “program of the king,” which the monarch had announced two months before the elections” (Monjib 2011, 06). This fact was an additional proof that the existing parties were not included in the decision-making process, despite the fact that the whole elections’ intention was to include the public in the legislative process through its elected representatives. In addition to that, the Party for Justice and Development (PJD) remained in the opposition despite its victories in many elections, and that was another disappointment to the public (FRIDE 2007). Finally, the Justice and Spirituality Group (*Jama’at Al Adl Wal Ihsan*) remained outside the political field and kept declaring that it cannot take part in fraudulent elections that controlled parties and that restricted the use of Islam in politics on the grounds that the king was the only representative of Islam in Morocco (Moqtadir 2005, 59-61).

CONCLUSION

The Moroccan Political structures before the Arab Spring were neither very open nor totally closed. Morocco had evolved throughout its history to become a state that could tolerate some sorts of plurality but not to the extent that substantial changes to the regime could occur. It had been engaged in a very steady –and slow– process of liberalization and modernization since the 1990s and though there were many cases of suppression, there had always been some space left for the public to demonstrate its dissatisfaction. This meant that the Moroccan regime had acquired a certain amount of flexibility that allowed it to know when to confront the public with force and when to follow the mainstream desires to avoid clashes. Therefore, Morocco succeeded in becoming a country that altered its policies and politics from being close to being open and vice versa, and it did that according to its evaluation of the particular balance of strength and weakness and according to its sense of safety and threat.

The regime’s flexibility was also very effective as it allowed it to bend when the wave of protests was strong and to regain control gradually as the protests started fainting. In the first months of protests, the Moroccan regime communicated with the protesters instead of confronting them and granted them constitutional reforms that they could not even demand, while it only started suppressing them when the movement started getting weaker. The result of this methodic alternation between the carrot and the stick tactics was that the moderate majority was satisfied with the reforms and withdrew from the protests, while the radical minority was silenced by the state’s coercive methods (Strachan 2014; Hespess 2011).

In Egypt, as we have seen, Mubarak and the Egyptian army have succeeded in making the nationalist party the only party that could win elections and that could elect the president. Unlike Morocco, where the king's position remained undisputed and the political conflict was successfully oriented towards the horizontal clashes between parties that kept taking turns in pretending to be ruling the country, the Egyptians failed to draw lines between the presidency and the government. The Egyptian regime had also developed a strict counter-opposition attitude that made it unable to tolerate any form of contention or dissent. Consequently, when the Egyptian youth protested on 25 January 2011, the regime reacted with violence, which was its only tool, and the people retaliated with more violence and demanded the fall of the government and the regime that were seen as one entity for the last three decades (Sheridan and Siemaszko 2011; CBS.News 2011).

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